ELLEN GALINSKY, *President and Co-Founder, Families and Work Institute*
STACY S. KIM, Ph.D., *Senior Research Associate, Families and Work Institute*

Navigating Work and Parenting by Working at Home: Perspectives of Workers and Children Whose Parents Work at Home*

Introduction

At a recent conference on work and family life, a parent asked: "I am thinking of going back to work. Wouldn't it be better if I had a job where I could work from home?"

As she talked, it became evident that she, like many others, assumed that working at home is a good method for managing the worlds of work and parenting, giving her the opportunity to do her best at both. Indeed, whether an employer offers work-at-home options for its employees is one of the factors that *Working Mother* magazine considers when compiling its "100 Best Companies for Working Mothers."

There are a number of assumptions that typically underlie the view that working at home or "telework" can help employed parents navigate work and family more successfully and thus be better parents than those who work outside the home:

- Teleworking parents spend more time and a different quality of time with their children.
- Teleworking parents do a better job at parenting their children.
- Teleworking parents feel better about the job that they are doing as parents.
- Teleworking parents experience less conflict between work and parenting.

In this paper, we conduct original analyses to test the above assumptions from the perspective of employed mothers, employed fathers, and children with employed parents using data from a study conducted by Ellen Galinsky for her book (1999/2000), *Ask the Children*.

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Overview of the Study

Using data from nationally representative samples of employed parents and children collected for the Ask the Children study, the experience of parents who telework and children whose parents telework are compared with non-teleworking parents and children of non-teleworking parents.

Methods

Sample

Our nationally representative *student* sample, 1023 children in the 3rd through the 12th grades, ages 8 through 18, were asked to complete questionnaires administered in their schools in April-May 1998. Harris Interactive conducted the data collection. This sample includes children living in various family situations: two-parent families and single-parent families as well as families with dual-earners, single-earners, and unemployed adults. In the student sample, "mother" is defined as either the biological mother or step-mother who lives with the student. Likewise, we define "father" as either the biological father or stepfather who lives with the child. Students who do not live with at least one biological parent or stepparent are excluded from the sample.

Our *parent* sample is a subsample of a nationally representative group of 605 employed parents with children ages newborn through 18 who were interviewed over the telephone by Harris Interactive in June 1998. The sample includes fathers, mothers, stepfathers, stepmothers, and guardians who live with their child(ren) at least half of the time and who regularly engage in paid work at least one hour a week. For purposes of this report, the sample was restricted to parents with children 8 through 18 years old, the ages of children in the student sample, reducing the parent sample size to 385. Questions about children refer to a single child — either the only child in residence or a randomly selected child — who is referred to as the "focal" child.

It should be emphasized that the two samples are independent; that is, the adults in the parent sample are not the parents of the children in the student sample.

Definitions

Because the original study was not a study of telework, we do not have detailed information concerning the parents' teleworking circumstances. We do not know how much work is conducted at home, the kind of work that is being done at home, whether parents are working at home by choice, and what their reasons are for choosing to work at home. Although parents were asked if they are self-employed, students were not asked to make this distinction. Thus, our definition for "telework" for both the parent and the student sample is broadly determined as "usually working at home" *and* "usually working at home and at another location" versus "usually working at a location other than the home."

Within the sample of 385 parents with children ages 8 through 18, there are 39 teleworking fathers, representing 22% of all fathers with children these ages. Additionally, there are 35 teleworking mothers, representing 20% of all mothers with children these ages. Within the student sample of 1023 students, there are 208 with teleworking fathers, 28% of students in the study. There are 244 children in the student sample in the 3rd through 12th grades (ages 8 through 18) with teleworking mothers, 31% of students in the study.

Analyses

In order to test the assumptions we pose about telework, we compared mothers and fathers who telework with those who do not and children with parents who telework with those whose parents do not. Chi-square or T-tests were used as appropriate. When examining student data, we set the threshold for statistical significance at the $p < .01$ level. We set the threshold for statistical significance at the $p < .05$ level when examining parent data due to the smaller size of the samples of mothers and fathers.

Background Demographics

Because we are examining similarities and differences between two groups of employees — those who telework and those who do not — it is important to assess whether any of the differences might be caused by background differences between the two groups. Thus, we tested for these differences and found few. According to the parent data, there are no differences in family type, whether parents have an employed spouse, number of children in the household, age of the youngest child, household income, perceived economic security, ethnicity, or education level. We did find that mothers, but not fathers, who telework are much more likely to have a 4-year college degree (46%) than employed mothers who work at a location outside of the home (18%).

Interestingly, children with teleworking fathers are more likely than children with non-teleworking fathers to report that their families are in precarious economic situations. Forty-seven percent of students with teleworking fathers say their family has “a hard time buying the things we need” or “just enough money for the things we need.” In contrast, 36% of students with non-teleworking fathers describe their family’s economic situation in this way. Given that there are no reported differences from the perspective of fathers, it could be that children of fathers who work at home are more likely to interpret their economic situation as more precarious than other children with employed fathers because family finances are more visible to these children.

When we looked at job demographics among parents, we found a few differences. Teleworkers are much more likely to be self-employed than other workers are: 39% of teleworking mothers and 36% of teleworking fathers in our sample are self-employed compared with 7% of mothers and 10% of fathers who do not work from their homes.

In addition, according to parents, teleworkers are less likely to work daytime shifts. Overall, 49% of teleworking mothers and 47% of teleworking fathers work daytime schedules, compared with 83% of non-teleworking mothers and 75% of non-teleworking fathers.

Table 1. Employed parents with children 8-18: Background demographics

	EMPLOYED MOTHERS			EMPLOYED FATHERS		
	Works at home all or part of the time Percentage *(sample size)*	*Sig*	**Works outside of the home** Percentage *(sample size)*	**Works at home all or part of the time** Percentage *(sample size)*	*Sig*	**Works outside of the home** Percentage *(sample size)*
Family Type	(n=36)		(n=135)	(n=39)		(n=136)
Couple	58%		69%	87%		93%
Single	42%		31%	13%		7%
Employed spouse	(n=20)		(n=93)	(n=34)		(n=126)
Yes	95%		99%	71%		76%
No	5%		1%	30%		24%
Number of children in the household	(n=35)		(n=136)	(n=39)		(n=136)
One	43%		48%	39%		40%
Two	37%		32%	31%		32%
Three	11%		15%	23%		24%
Four or more	9%		4%	8%		4%
Age of youngest child	(n=35)		(n=136)	(n=39)		(n=136)
0-2 years	3%		3%	3%		6%
3-5	14%		7%	3%		7%
6-9	14%		15%	33%		21%
10-13	29%		37%	18%		38%
14+	40%		39%	44%		29%
Household income	(n=35)		(n=134)	(n=37)		(n=133)
$25,000 or less	26%		27%	11%		11%
$25,001 - $50,000	40%		43%	43%		41%
$50,001 - $75,000	26%		17%	27%		31%
Over $75,000.	9%		13%	19%		17%
Economic security	(n=35)		(n=134)	(n=39)		(n=136)
I have a hard time buying the things my family needs	20%		16%	15%		10%
I have just enough money for the things my family needs	37%		49%	33%		41%
I have no problem buying the things my family needs and we can also buy special things	43%		36%	51%		49%

Table 1. Employed parents with children 8-18: Background demographics (continued)

	EMPLOYED MOTHERS		EMPLOYED FATHERS		
	Works at home all or part of the time Percentage *(sample size)*	*Sig*	**Works outside of the home** Percentage *(sample size)*	**Works at home all or part of the time** Percentage *(sample size)*	*Sig*	**Works outside of the home** Percentage *(sample size)*
Ethnicity	(n=36)		(n=134)	(n=38)		(n=135)
White, non-Hispanic	64%		72%	90%		73%
Black, non-Hispanic	25%		13%	5%		12%
Hispanic	6%		10%	0%		12%
Other, non-Hispanic	6%		5%	5%		3%
Education	(n=35)	*	(n=136)	(n=39)		(n=136)
High school or less	31%		40%	44%		45%
Some post-secondary school	23%		43%	21%		34%
Four-year college degree or more	46%		18%	36%		21%

Significance: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001; Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Because other larger data sets can provide fuller information than ours, we will report only broad occupational and industry differences. We found that teleworking fathers are more likely than non-teleworking fathers to have managerial or professional occupations (51% of teleworking fathers versus 33% of non-teleworking fathers), to work in professional service industries (28% versus 18%), and in finance, insurance and real estate industries (13% versus 1%).

Advantages and Limitations of These Data Sets

These data sets address a large number of issues related to work and parenting. As previously stated, they do not provide detailed information about the teleworking situation of the parent. Neither do they provide longitudinal information nor do they contain independent observations about how the children of teleworkers are faring.

Still we believe that these analyses are quite informative given the unique nature of the Ask the Children study. To "ask the children" about work and family life is a new and seminal area of research. Furthermore, few studies provide such large representatives groups of children and parents. As a result, the findings from this and other papers using these Ask the Children data sets can play an important role in deepening our understanding as well as in charting public and private programs and policies to address the work-life needs of employed parents and their children.

Findings

ASSUMPTION ONE: Teleworking Parents Spend More Time and a Different Quality of Time with Their Children.

Do teleworking parents spend more time with their children than other parents?

Parents were asked to estimate on average, on days they are working and on days they are not working, how much time they spend doing things with their focal child. Children were asked how much time they spend with their parents on typical work days and typical non-work days. However, while students in 7th grade and higher were asked to report specific amounts of time, students in 3rd through 6th grades were asked to select one of the following: less than 30 minutes, less than an hour but more than 30 minutes, 1-2 hours, 3-4 hours, 5-6 hours, more than 6 hours.

Amount of time with children — according to mothers and fathers. It was a surprise that parents who telework do not spend more time doing things with their child than parents who work in other locations, either on work days or non-work days. Mothers who telework and those who do not spend an average of 2.7 hours doing things with their child on work days and 5.4 hours on non-work days. Similarly, fathers who telework and those who do not spend an average of 2.1 hours doing things with their child on work days and 4.8 hours on non-work days.

Amount of time with mothers and fathers — according to children. In contrast to the finding from mothers, children, 8 to 18 years old, who have mothers who usually work at home or work at home and at another location, report spending more time together on work days than the children whose mothers do not telework: 27% of students spend over six hours on a typical work day with their teleworking mothers compared with 17% of students with non-teleworking mothers. There is no difference for non-work days: 54% of students with mothers who telework and mothers who do not telework report spending over six hours on a typical non-work day with their mothers.

Children whose fathers telework and those who do not report spending equivalent amounts of time with their child on work days and on non-work days. On a typical work day, 11% of students with teleworking fathers and non-teleworking fathers spend over six hours with their father. On a typical non-work day, 44% of students with employed fathers spend over six hours on a typical non-work day with their fathers.

Interestingly, on non-work days, older students — those in the 7th through 12th grades — report spending significantly more time with their teleworking fathers than older students with non-teleworking fathers. On average, older students say they spend 8.6 hours on typical non-work days with their teleworking fathers while older students with non-teleworking fathers spend 6.6 hours with their fathers.

The differences in the perspectives of parents and children are fascinating. Parents report spending similar amounts of time with their children regardless of whether they telework or only work outside the home. Children of teleworking mothers, however, report spending more time with their mothers on work

days and older children of teleworking fathers report spending more time with their fathers on non-work days than their counterparts with non-teleworking parents. These differences are worthy of further study.

Are teleworking parents more likely to feel that they have enough time with their children than other parents?

Parents and children were asked whether the time they have together is "too little, just enough, or too much."

Enough time — according to mothers and fathers. Given that mothers who telework and those who do not report spending similar amounts of time with their focal child, it is not surprising that their reports on the adequacy of the amount of time they spend with their child is also similar: 58% of mothers who telework and those who do not say they spend just enough time with their child.

In contrast, fathers who telework are more likely than other employed fathers to feel they spend enough time with their child. In fact, only 51% of teleworking fathers say they spend "too little" time with their focal child compared with 69% of non-teleworking fathers. It may be they are especially likely to yearn to be with their kids.

Enough time with mothers and fathers — according to children. The children of teleworkers and non-teleworkers are equally likely to feel that they have enough time with their mothers and their fathers. Overall, 67% of children of teleworking mothers and non-teleworking mothers say they spend enough time with their mothers. Likewise, 60% of children of teleworking fathers and non-teleworking fathers say they spend enough time with their fathers.

Do teleworking parents do more activities with their children than other parents?

We asked parents and children to report the frequency of engaging in a series of activities with each other. They were asked how often they:

- Eat a meal together.
- Play a game or sport, or exercise together.
- Do homework together.
- Watch television together.

The response choices were never, one or two times a week, three or four times a week, five or six times a week, or everyday.

The Ask the Children study found that children who engaged in activities more frequently with their parents feel that their parents are more successful at managing work and family life and give their parents higher marks for their parenting skills (Galinsky 1999/2000).

Frequency of engaging in activities with children — according to mothers and fathers. Perhaps surprisingly, mothers who telework are no more likely to engage in activities with their children than mothers who work outside their homes. Overall, 75% of mothers say they eat a meal together with their child everyday; 12% say they play a game, exercise or do a sport together everyday; 27% say they do homework together everyday; and, 35% say they watch television together everyday.

Similarly, fathers who telework and those who do not report similar levels of involvement in activities with their children. Overall, 56% of fathers say they eat a meal together with their child everyday; 14% say they play a game, exercise or do a sport together everyday; 14% say they do homework together everyday; and, 26% say they watch television together everyday.

Frequency of engaging in activities with children — according to children. Children were asked about their participation in the four above activities with at least one of their parents. We found no differences in being involved in activities when kids have a teleworking parent and when they do not.

Thus, in the eyes of the parents and the children, parents and children appear to be engaging in activities together at similar frequencies regardless of whether there is a teleworking parent present.

Are teleworking parents better able to focus on their children when they are together?

In the open-ended interviews conducted before designing the Ask the Children study, parents and children alike reported how important "being there for the child" is. Again and again, when parents described being successful as parents, they used the word "focus." Here are two quotes from individual interviews conducted for that study (Galinsky 1999, p.144):

> *Being there for your kids is emotionally and mentally — it doesn't have to be physical. There was a time when the joke at the dinner table was "earth to mom, earth to mom," because I would be physically sitting there but mentally somewhere else. Then the issue became "I will focus on you, I do want to be here for you." I think I started just trying to be mentally more alert and trying to look more into them and say "I'm here, this is our time."*
>
> Mother of two teenage children

> *I feel good when I can focus on my kids and I can feel like I am present and in the present tense and not always kind of figuring out the next transition . . . when I can be creative and I can encourage their creativity, rather than thinking about how to get from one point to another like [from] meal to bed time.*
>
> Mother of an 8-year-old daughter and infant boy

Analyses for the Ask the Children study confirmed that children who felt that their parents could really focus on them when they were together see their parents more positively.

Focus — according to mothers and fathers. One could assume that working at home would provide more opportunities to focus on one's child but this assumption is not confirmed by the analyses for this paper. Mothers and fathers who telework and those work outside the home are equally likely to feel that they can focus on their child. Overall, 64% of mothers report they find it "very easy" to really focus on their child when they are together; and, 50% of fathers say the same.

Focus — according to children about their mothers and fathers. From the children's point of view we find a slightly different story. There are no differences between kids whose mothers telework and kids with non-teleworking mothers when it comes to mothers' focusing on them when they are together: 62% of all students with employed mothers say it is "very easy" for their mothers to really focus on them when they are together. We did, however, find differences when it comes to fathers. In contrast to what one might expect, in children's views, fathers who work at locations outside their home have an easier time focusing on them than fathers who telework. While 55% of children with non-teleworking fathers say that it is "very easy" for their fathers to focus on them, 45% of the children of teleworking fathers make the same claim. Only 12% of children with non-teleworking fathers report that it is "somewhat" or "very difficult" for their fathers to focus on them compared with 25% for those with teleworking fathers. When work is nearby, fathers may have a harder time putting work aside to pay attention to their children.

ASSUMPTION TWO: Teleworking Parents Do a Better Job at Parenting Their Children.

Do teleworking parents have higher assessments of their parenting skills?

In order to assess parenting skills, parents were asked to assess themselves using grades (A, B, C, D, or F) on 12 parenting skills that research indicates are associated with children's positive development (Galinsky 1999/2000). Children were also asked to grade their parents on the same parenting skills. These include:

- Raise your child with good values.
- Appreciate your child for who he/she is.
- Encourage your child to want to learn and to enjoy learning.
- Make your child feel important and loved.
- Are able to attend the important events in your child's life.
- Are there for your child when he or she is sick.
- Spend time talking with your child.
- Establish family routines and traditions with your child.
- Are someone your child can go to when she or he is upset.
- Control your temper when your child does something that makes your angry.
- Know what is really going on in your child's life.

Parenting skills — according to mothers. Although there are no differences between the two groups of mothers in their assessments of their parenting skills when we looked at each of above skills one by one, we did find differences in an overall index of parenting skills created by averaging individual items. Mothers who telework see themselves more positively than mothers who work in other locations. On average (where 5 is an "A" and 1 is an "F"), teleworking mothers give themselves an average grade of 3.5 in the twelve parenting skills, a figure that is higher than the 3.4 average of non-teleworking mothers.

We also found that mothers who telework have more traditional views of the roles of mothers and fathers than mothers who work primarily outside of the home. Specifically, they are more likely to endorse the view that it is better for everyone involved if the man earns the money and the woman takes care of the home and children: 37% of teleworking mothers "strongly agree" compared with 10% of non-teleworking mothers. Perhaps teleworking mothers feel more positive about their parenting skills, in part, because by working at home, they see themselves as coming closer to an ideal that has been a mainstream tenet of American family life.

Parenting skills — according to fathers. Although mothers who telework see themselves more positively than mothers who do not, there are no differences for fathers when we look at parenting skills item-by-item or overall. On average, fathers give themselves a grade of 3.4 on parenting skills.

Parenting skills of mothers and fathers — according to children. No differences emerge in children's assessments of their mothers' parenting skills when they have mothers who work at home and when they have mothers who work in other locations; children give their employed mothers an average grade of 4.3 on parenting skills. Likewise, there are no differences for fathers; children give their employed fathers an average grade of 4.1 on the twelve parenting skills.

ASSUMPTION THREE: Teleworking Parents Feel More Satisfied with the Job That They Are Doing as Parents.

Do teleworking parents feel more successful as parents than other parents?

Parents were asked how often they feel successful as a parent using a scale of very often, often, sometimes, rarely or never. Children were not asked a comparable question.

Feelings of success as parents — according to mothers and fathers. Mothers who telework and those who do not feel equally successful in their parenting roles; 41% of mothers in both groups say they "very often" feel successful as a parent. The same holds for fathers; 40% of fathers in both groups report they "very often" feel successful as a parent.

ASSUMPTION FOUR: Teleworking Parents Experience Less Conflict Between Work and Parenting.

What factors do other studies find associated with work-parenting conflict and how do teleworking parents fare in terms of these factors?

Despite the strong belief that work-life programs and policies are, in and of themselves, helpful in reducing employees' work-family conflict, the research tells a different story. For many years, studies have found, for example, that alternative work arrangements are not the panacea that people suppose. First, many individuals working alternative schedules do so because they are required to (Presser 1995). As long ago as 1983, Staines and Pleck found that working nonstandard shifts increased work-family conflict. Likewise, working part-time has financial costs that can increase conflict (Glass & Camarigg 1992).

One critical factor in determining whether flexible work arrangements, such as working at home, have a positive or negative impact appears to be "choice." When employees have a choice over their schedules and workplaces, they experience fewer negative repercussions (Staines & Pleck 1986; Negrey 1984; Fast & Frederick 1996; Tausig & Fenwick, in press).

Unfortunately, the data set we used for this paper does not probe whether the parents who are working at home have chosen to do so. Furthermore, we do not know if these parents are working at home primarily for work-family or for other reasons. These factors, we suspect would make a difference.

In general, simply having access to or even the use of work-life programs and policies do not result in lower work-family conflict (Families and Work Institute 1995; Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg, 1998). Beyond employee choice, other things also make a difference. In the Ask the Children study, for example, a number of work and workplace factors were associated with lower conflict between work and parenting (Galinsky 1999/2000). These include:

- Having a job that demands less time;
- Having workplace support with greater support from supervisors, coworkers, and a more family-friendly workplace culture;
- Having a less stressful job where parents feel that they can really focus on their work and are working in a less demanding and hectic atmosphere; and
- Having a better quality job that is more meaningful, offers more job autonomy, more learning opportunities, and more challenge.

In other words, it's the job itself that accounts for much work-family conflict.

Because we are using the same data set in this paper about teleworking, we were able to test each of these factors to determine if the jobs of teleworking parents are different from the jobs of parents who work in other locations (see the Appendix for individual items averaged to create these indicies). We only found a few significant differences.

Workplace support — according to mothers and fathers. As stated earlier, teleworking parents are more likely to be self-employed and therefore less likely to have an immediate supervisor or boss. Forty-nine percent of teleworking mothers have supervisors while 87% of non-teleworking mothers have supervisors. And, 62% of teleworking fathers have supervisors compared with 87% of fathers who do not telework.

However, when these teleworking parents do have supervisors, they are just as likely to have a supervisor who is supportive as parents who work outside the home. On a scale averaged by three items, where 4=high support and 1=low support, both mothers and fathers give their supervisors an average rating of 3.1.

We also found that teleworking parents receive the same levels of support from their coworkers as non-teleworking parents do. On average (where 4=high support and 1=low support), mothers rate their co-worker support at 3.3, while fathers give their coworker support as 3.4. In addition, when we compared teleworking and non-teleworking parents who work for someone else, we found that they rate the family-friendliness of their workplace cultures similarly. Mothers who telework and those who do not give their workplace culture a 2.8 rating. Likewise, all fathers in our sample give their workplace culture an average 2.9 rating.

Thus there appears to be no difference in the kind of workplace support that teleworkers and non-teleworkers receive in their jobs.

Job quality — according to mothers and fathers. We found that teleworking mothers (not fathers) report much higher levels of job autonomy than those mothers who work outside the home. On average (where 4=high autonomy and 1=low autonomy), teleworking mothers rate their jobs (3.3) significantly higher than non-teleworking mothers (2.9). However, teleworking fathers and non-teleworking fathers do not differ. Their overall average rating is 3.2.

Teleworking fathers (not mothers) say their jobs have more learning opportunities than what non-teleworking fathers report. On average (where 4=greater opportunity and 1=less opportunity), teleworking fathers rate their jobs as providing more learning opportunities (3.6) compared with non-teleworking fathers (3.3). Teleworking and non-teleworking mothers do not differ in the learning opportunities they report: mothers give their jobs an average rating of 3.4.

Parents who work at home are just as likely as parents who work outside of the home to feel that their work is meaningful to them. We found that 66% of teleworking mothers and non-teleworking mothers "strongly agree" that their work is meaningful to them, while 64% of teleworking fathers and non-teleworking fathers say their work is meaningful to them.

There are few differences in how teleworkers and non-teleworkers view the quality of their jobs, with the most intriguing difference being the amount of autonomy teleworking mothers report. Given the recent growth in the number of women-owned businesses, it is often speculated that women are leaving mainstream employment for more autonomy, which this finding would support.

Ability to focus on work and stress — according to mothers and fathers. Another difference has to do with focus. Parents who telework report that they are less able to focus on their work than parents who work outside the home. On average (5=difficulty focusing, 1=ease in focusing), mothers who work at home experience greater difficulty focusing on their work (3.5) than mothers who work outside of the home do (3.1). Likewise, fathers who telework experience greater difficulty focusing on their work (3.7) than non-teleworking fathers do (3.1).

However, we found no differences in the amount of stress on the job that parents, mothers or fathers, experience whether they work at home or outside of the home. On average (4=high stress and 1=low stress), all employed parents experience similar levels of stress (2.8).

Overall, it appears that parents who telework and those who do not receive similar levels of workplace support, when they work with others outside the home. However, with respect to certain aspects of job quality, there may be some advantages to working at home. Teleworking provides relatively more autonomy for mothers and relatively more learning opportunities for fathers. However, teleworking also appears to have some disadvantages. Teleworking mothers and fathers find it more difficult to focus on their work. Therefore, depending on individual work-at-home circumstances, teleworking parents can experience more or less work-family conflict.

Do teleworking parents place a higher priority on family life than other parents?

We asked parents two questions about how frequently they put their job before their family and their family before their job. Our measures for children were an adaptation of the same two questions asked of parents.

Priorities — according to mothers and fathers. Although one might suspect that teleworkers would place a higher priority on family life than those who do not work from their homes, this is not the case. Mothers and fathers who work at home and those who work outside the home do not differ in their responses to these work-family priority questions. Overall, 38% of mothers, those who telework and those who do not, say they "rarely" or "never" put their job before family and 49% say they "very often" or "often" put family before their job. Likewise, 34% of fathers, those who telework and those who do not, say they "rarely" or "never" put their job before family and 53% say they "very often" or "often" put family before their job.

Priorities of mothers and fathers — according to children. Children with teleworking mothers and those with non-teleworking mothers are equally likely to rate their mothers in putting family over work. We found that 84% of children with teleworking and non-teleworking mothers report their mothers "rarely" or "never" put their jobs before families and 79% report their mothers "very often" or "often" put their family before their jobs.

On the other hand, there is a difference between the children who have teleworking fathers and other children. Those children whose fathers work at home are less likely (69%) than children with non-teleworking fathers (78%) to see their fathers "rarely" or "never" put their jobs before families. However, children of teleworking fathers and of non-teleworking fathers similarly report their fathers "very often" or "often" put their family before their jobs (73% overall).

These two groups of parents feel they have similar priorities — more often putting their family before their jobs — regardless of whether they work at home or work outside of the home. However, we find that children's views are not congruent with fathers' views; children of teleworking fathers say their fathers put job before family more often than children of other employed fathers report.

Do teleworking parents work too much compared with other parents?

Before we address parents' and children's judgments of how much parents work, it is important to look at how much time teleworking mothers and fathers report working.

How much parents work — according to parents. Both teleworking mothers and fathers appear to work more days per week than their counterparts. On average, teleworking fathers work 5.7 days per week, while non-teleworking fathers work 5.3 days per week. Similarly, teleworking mothers work 5.7 days per week, while non-teleworking mothers work 5.0 days per week

We also looked at work hours per week (defined as all hours, paid and unpaid, at all jobs), and did not find any differences in the average number of hours that mothers or fathers report working related to where they worked. Mothers who telework and those who do not work an average of 41.4 hours per week. Fathers who telework and those who do not work on average 50.4 hours per week. However, when we group parents into those who work more or less than 50 hours a week, those who telework are more likely than other parents to work these extreme hours. Teleworking mothers are more likely (23%) than non-teleworking mothers (10%) to report they work over 50 hours. Likewise, teleworking fathers are more likely (46%) than non-teleworking fathers (28%) to report they work over 50 hours. Because work is close at hand, this finding makes sense.

How much parents work — according to children. Children's responses echo the fact that teleworking fathers work more than non-teleworking fathers work. Children of fathers who telework report that their fathers work more days per week (5.7 days per week) than the children of non teleworking fathers (5.4 days per week). While our data on mothers reveal a difference in days worked per week, the children's answers do not: overall, teleworking mothers and non-teleworking mothers work an average of 5.1 days per week.

In order to tap into parents' and children's views about how much parents work, parents and children were also asked whether the parent works too much, too little, or the right amount.

Working too much — according to mothers and fathers. Teleworking mothers are more likely than non-teleworking mothers to believe they are working too much: 49% of teleworkers say that they work too much compared with 25% of those who do not work from their homes. On the other hand, there is no difference between the two groups of fathers in their feeling that they are working too much; 34% of fathers say they are working too much.

Working too much — according to children. No differences are found between the kids whose mothers telework and those whose mothers do not in whether they think their mothers work too much: 25% of children with teleworking mothers and non-teleworking mothers say they are working "too much." On the other hand, the children whose fathers telework are much more likely than other kids to think that their fathers work too much: 46% make this statement about their fathers compared with 28% of other children.

It is interesting to note that while teleworking mothers are more likely than other employed mothers to feel they are working too much, children do not echo this difference. Perhaps teleworking mothers feel they work too much because working at home brings them closer to, or makes them more aware of, the demands and needs of their children. It is also notable that while teleworking fathers feel the same way as other employed fathers about the amount they are working, children of teleworking fathers are more likely to feel their fathers are working too much compared with other children whose fathers work outside the home. It could be that even though teleworking fathers are physically present they are less available psychologically or socially to their children.

Do children want to work as much as their parents when they are grown?

Another way of looking at the level of work effort that parents put in is to ask parents whether they think their child will want to work as much as they do when the child is grown, and to ask children whether they will want to work as much as their parents when they are adults.

Working in the future — according to mothers and fathers. Since teleworking mothers are more likely to think they are working too much, it is not surprising that they are also more likely than other mothers to see their child as opting for a less strenuous work pattern. We found that 47% of teleworking mothers believe that when their child is grown they will want to work less than they do while 19% of non-teleworking mothers feel the same way.

And since teleworking fathers view their amount of work similarly to that of non-teleworking fathers, it is not surprising that the two groups of fathers are also similar in the way they believe their kids will want to work in the future. Similar proportions of teleworking fathers and non-teleworking fathers believe their children will want to work less when they grow up: overall 43% say their children will want to work less.

Working in the future — according to children. The children of teleworking and non-teleworking mothers do not differ in their views of working in the future: overall 53% of children with employed mothers say they would like to work the same amount as their mothers. On the other hand, because more children of teleworking fathers think their fathers work too much, it is not unexpected that more of them want to work less than their fathers: 40% of the children of teleworking fathers feel this way compared with 30% of other children.

Do children know more about the work of teleworkers than the work of other parents?

We asked children how much they knew about the kind of work their mother/father does. We also asked how often children hear the good things that happen in their parents' work or the bad things that happen in their parents' work.

Awareness of mothers' work — according to children. Surprisingly, children whose mothers telework are no more likely than children with other employed mothers to know about the kind of work that their mother does: 66% of children of teleworking and non-teleworking mothers say they know "a lot" about their mothers' work. In addition, 45% of children with employed mothers say their mothers talk about the

good things at work "often" or "very often"; 31% say their mothers talk about *bad* things that happen at work "often" or "very often."

Likewise, children with fathers who work at home are no more likely to know about their fathers' work than children whose fathers work outside the home. Overall, 54% of children with employed fathers say they know "a lot" about their fathers' work; 33% say their fathers talk about the *good* things that happen at work "often" or "very often"; and 22% say their father talks about the bad things that happen at work "often" or "very often."

Clearly, a lot of parents are not directly and intentionally sharing information about work with their children, even though parents' work can be like a living laboratory that teaches children about the world of work.

Do teleworking parents feel more successful and experience less difficulty in managing work and parenting than other parents?

The Ask the Children study probed this issue with two questions. Parents were asked how much difficulty they experience managing work and family in a typical work week and how successful they feel managing their work and parenting responsibilities. Students were asked similar questions. They were asked to assess how successful their parents are at managing work and family and the extent to which they would like to manage their work and family lives like their parents.

Difficulty managing work and family life — according to mothers and fathers. Parents who telework and those who do not are equally likely to feel that it is difficult to manage work and family life. Overall, 43% of teleworking and non-teleworking mothers say they find that in a typical week managing work and family life is "very difficult" or "somewhat difficult." Similarly, 43% of teleworking and non-teleworking fathers say the same.

Success managing work and parenting — according to mothers and fathers. Likewise, there is no difference between teleworking parents and non-teleworking parents in their feelings of success in managing work and parenting responsibilities. We found that 35% of mothers feel "very successful" at managing their work and parenting responsibilities as did 31% of fathers.

Mothers' and fathers' success managing work and parenting — according to children. Most children, those with teleworking and non-teleworking parents alike, give their parents high marks for their success in managing their work and family life. Seventy-four percent of children of teleworking mothers and of children of non-teleworking mothers say their mothers are "very successful" at managing work and family. Similarly, 70% of children of teleworking and non-teleworking say their fathers are "very successful" at managing work and family.

Parents as role models in managing work and family life — according to children. Children with teleworking mothers and fathers are just as likely as other children with employed parents to want to manage their work and family life like their parents. We found that 41% of children with teleworking

mothers and non-teleworking mothers say they want to manage their work and family life in a way "very similar" to that of their mothers. Similarly, 36% of children whose fathers who telework and work outside the home say they wanted to manage their work and family very much like their fathers.

Do teleworking parents experience less spillover than other parents?

We define spillover as the transfer of moods and energy levels from one domain of life to another. To assess spillover, we expanded on a measure from the Families and Work Institute's National Study of the Changing Workforce (Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg, 1998) for the Ask the Children study (Galinsky, 1999/2000). To assess *negative* spillover from the job-to-parenting, parents were asked how often over the past 3 months:

- Have you not had the energy to do things with your child because of your job?
- Have you not been in as good a mood as you would like to be with your child because of your job?
- Has your job kept you from doing as good a job in parenting your child as you would like?

To assess *positive* spillover from the job-to-parenting, parents were also asked over the past 3 months, how often:

- Have you had more energy to do things with your child because of your job?
- Have you been in a good mood with your child because of your job?

To test whether teleworking mothers and fathers experience more spillover from their jobs than mothers and fathers who do not telework, we created an index for positive and one for negative spillover by averaging the individual items listed above. Some of these questions were asked of older children (7th through 12th grades). Because not all of these questions were asked of students, we did not create spillover indices for children but rather report on individual items.

Spillover — according to mothers and fathers. Given that teleworking mothers feel they work too much, it is not surprising to find that they experience more negative job-to-parenting spillover than mothers who work outside the home. Using a scale where 5=high spillover and 1=low spillover, we found that teleworking mothers have a higher average negative job-to-spillover score (2.6) than non-teleworking mothers (2.3). Looking at individual items, we find one significant difference: teleworking mothers are more likely (52%) than non-teleworking mothers (32%) to say that their job kept them from doing as good a job in parenting "very often," "often," or "sometimes." On all other items, teleworking and non-teleworking mothers gave similar reports of negative job-to-parenting spillover.

Since in their feelings about working too much there are no differences between fathers, it is not surprising that we find that teleworking fathers do not differ from non-teleworking fathers on negative job-to-parenting spillover scores. The overall average is 2.4. On individual items, teleworking and non-teleworking fathers gave similar reports of negative job-to-parenting spillover.

Parents report similar levels of positive job-to-parenting spillover, regardless of whether they telework or work outside the home. The average score for teleworking and non-teleworking fathers is 2.8; and the average score for teleworking and non-teleworking mothers: 2.6.

Spillover — according to children. The older children — children in 7th through 12th grades — of teleworking mothers are no more likely to feel that their mothers are affected positively or negatively by work than are the older children of non-teleworking mothers (see Table 2).

When we look at fathers, however, we did find that a greater proportion of older children with teleworking fathers (39%), compared with older children of non-teleworking fathers (28%), report that their fathers "sometimes," "very often," or "often" has not been in a good mood when they are together.

Again, we find that children have different views from their parents. While teleworking mothers report experiencing more spillover than non-teleworking mothers do, there are no differences in the children of these two groups of mothers. And, while fathers experience similar levels of spillover regardless of whether they work at home or outside of the home, we find that children of teleworking fathers perceive their fathers as being in a bad mood more often than children of non-teleworking fathers. These discrepancies again raise the question of whether mothers are working at home in ways that are different from the ways fathers work at home. One could, in fact, liken mothers to be shock absorbers of work pressures.

Do teleworking parents experience more work interference than other parents?

Work interference is measured by a scale developed for the Ask the Children study (Galinsky 1999/2000), using the following items. Parents were asked how, often in the last 3 months, did you:

- Think about work when you were with your child?
- Worry about your work when you were with your child?
- Have your child wait to be with your because of your work?
- Get interrupted by the demands of work when you were with your child?

Older children, 7th through 12th graders in our sample, were also asked similar questions about their parents.

Work interference — according to parents. Teleworking parents are more likely to experience work interference with parenting than parents who work outside of the home do. On a scale averaging the four items (where 5=high interference and 1=low interference), teleworking mothers experience greater work interference with parenting (2.6) than non-teleworking mothers do (1.9). Teleworking fathers also experience greater work interference with parenting (2.6) than non-teleworking fathers do (2.1).

When we look at this scale, item by item, we find differences between mothers who telework and those who do not in how much their jobs interfere with parenting in three of the four items (see Table 3). Like

Table 2. Children in grades 7-12: Views of spillover among mothers and fathers

	Parent works at home all or part of the time Percentage (sample size)	Sig	Parent works outside of the home Percentage (sample size)
Percent saying very often, often, or sometimes			
My mother does not have energy to do things with me because of her job	(n=136) 38%		(n=305) 40%
My mother has more energy to do things with me because of her job	(n=131) 31%		(n=303) 28%
My mother has not been in a good mood with me because of her job	(n=137) 35%		(n=305) 35%
My mother has been in a good mood with me because of her job	(n=131) 49%		(n=303) 51%
My father does not have energy to do things with me because of his job	(n=118) 40%		(n=302) 29%
My father has more energy to do things with me because of his job	(n=117) 29%		(n=299) 38%
My father has not been in a good mood with me because of his job	(n=119) 39%	**	(n=299) 28%
My father has been in a good mood with me because of his job	(n=119) 50%		(n=297) 54%

Significance: **p<.01, ***p<.001

mothers, teleworking fathers report more work interference on three of the four items than fathers who do not work from their home.

Work interference among mothers — according to children. Although teleworking mothers are more likely to report that their work interferes with parenting than mothers who do not work at home, kids do not see it this way. When asked about how often their mothers think about work, worry about work, or get interrupted by work when they are with them, as well as how often they have to wait for their mothers because of work, the children of teleworking and non-teleworking mothers do not differ in their responses (see Table 4).

Work interference among fathers — according to children. There are dramatic differences in children's assessments of their fathers. The children of fathers who work at home are much more likely to report that their fathers' work interferes with their parenting than the children of fathers who work outside the home. These differences are also presented in Table 4.

Table 3. Employed parents with children 8-18: Work interference

EMPLOYED MOTHERS			EMPLOYED FATHERS		
	Works at home all or part of the time Percentage *(sample size)*	*Sig*	**Works outside of the home** Percentage *(sample size)*	**Works at home all or part of the time** Percentage *(sample size)*	*Sig*	**Works outside of the home** Percentage *(sample size)*
Percent saying very often, often, or sometimes						
Think about work when you were with your child	(n=36) 56%		(n=135) 42%	(n=39) 62%	***	(n=135) 39%
Worry about work when you were with your child	(n=35) 46%	***	(n=136) 18%	(n=40) 55%	***	(n=136) 25%
Have your child wait to be with you because of your work	(n=36) 61%	***	(n=136) 30%	(n=39) 59%		(n=135) 32%
Get interrupted by the demands of work when you were with your child	(n=35) 34%	***	(n=135) 13%	(n=39) 31%	**	(n=136) 13%

Significance: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

In comparing children's experiences with their teleworking mothers and fathers, children report work interfering in their relationship with their mothers less often than with their teleworking fathers. For example, 31% of children report that their teleworking mothers think about work at least sometimes when they are with them compared with 51% for fathers. In terms of waiting, 31% report waiting for their teleworking mothers while 45% report waiting for their teleworking fathers at least some of the time.

While teleworking mothers and fathers experience work interference with parenting in similar ways, mothers may make a more conscious effort to curb the negative repercussions on children. While this would seem beneficial for children, the impact on both parents and children call for further study.

Conclusion

Although there are many similarities in the work and family lives of parents who work outside the home and those who work at home most or part of the time, there are also some very important differences. Perhaps the most intriguing difference is in the spillover and work interference experienced by teleworkers and the children of teleworkers. Mothers who telework are more likely than other mothers to report that their work spills over into their family lives, interfering with their parenting, while the children of teleworking mothers are no different from the children of non-teleworking mothers in reporting these problems. On the other hand, teleworking fathers are no different from fathers who do not telework in perceiving negative spillover from work to parenting, but children see things differently.

In their book, *Blur: The Speed of Change in the Connected Economy*, authors Stan Davis and Christopher Meyer (1998) write about a "meltdown" of all traditional boundaries:

> *In the BLUR world, products and services are merging. Buyers sell and sellers buy. Neat value chains are messy economic webs. Homes are offices. No longer is there a clear line between structure and process, owning and using, knowing and learning, real and virtual. Less and less separates employee and employer* (p. 7).

The lines between work and non-work have, in general, become much more porous for many workers in today's 24-7 economy with the advent of voice mail, email, faxes and what the Hudson Institute has called the "death of distance." Nowhere is this BLUR more evident than in telework. The home *is* the workplace and the workplace *is* the home.

While these analyses suggest some disadvantages to teleworking and show that work can interfere with parenting, working at home is also appealing. Telework is frequently touted as a very important component of the family-friendly workplace. Ads on television show workers in the pajamas at their computers or able to take their children to the beach while holding conference calls. Indeed, a parent who teleworks who knew we were writing this paper wrote about the advantages of teleworking from her perspective:

> *I love telecommuting full-time. [I have] more time with family (husband and 2 young children) to attend preschool functions, doctor's appointments, share meal times (all three!) . . . [I'm] able to work during my personal best hours, able to concentrate on work without distractions. I learn new ways to establish relationships with colleagues and communicate with people (since I do not have the face-to-face interaction) . . . I save on clothing, dry cleaning, gas, auto wear and tear, and about $100 a year on car insurance.*

There have been, however, few examinations of telework from the perspectives of employed parents and children, and perhaps none for representative national samples. The results of the analyses conducted for this paper reveal that many of the frequently held assumptions about telework's advantages for navigating work and parenting do not hold up under scrutiny, especially for fathers. In sum, teleworking sometimes helps parents and children, but it can also bring the pressures of managing work and family life into full view for the children.

We hope this paper will deepen our understanding and lead to further research by bringing the realities of telework into full view for parents, employers, and policymakers alike. If parents, employers, and policymakers are more *intentional* about how they handle telework, its inherent advantages are more likely to be realized.

Comments by Leslie Cintron, Ph.D., *Research Associate, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University*

The Implications of Telework for Work-Life Balance

On October 23, 2000 President Clinton signed a law requiring federal agencies to offer the option of telecommuting to at least 25% of their workforce within six months. Currently less than 2% of federal workers telecommute at least once a week. What kind of effects can we expect to see from the government sending so many of their workers home?

As with any new work practice, telework — which includes telecommuting from home or working from satellite offices — has drawbacks as well as advantages. According to the *Telework America 2000* study, today an estimated 16.5 million Americans work regularly from home but the question remains: Is telework a bad idea whose time has come or the key to achieving a balance between work and life?

For some it sounds like paradise. Instead of fighting traffic you can be at your desk in less than a minute; rather than an uncomfortable business suit you could stay in your robe and slippers all day if you want. No one would be the wiser. You can start work whenever you want, take a break when you need to, and even personalize your schedule so you can pick up the kids from soccer practice or hit the shopping mall on a deserted afternoon. If you work at a smaller satellite office closer to home, you can cut down on your commute time, your gas and insurance costs, and your frustration level.

But telework is not for everyone. Teleworkers may not be distracted by water cooler chatter but the distance from co-workers can feel isolating. Teleworkers may feel out of touch with what's happening in the rest of the office and lose valuable face time with supervisors that decide which workers will be promoted. And, because those supervisors must contact teleworkers by e-mail, phone and fax, the virtual office never closes.

When we bring work home, our old attitude of "work-first" is often part of the package. The boundaries between work and life can become increasingly blurred. When that happens, home is no longer a refuge from work.

Instead of having more time to spend with our family, on leisure pursuits, or in community activities, the extra time we save not by commuting is often absorbed by round-the-clock work demands, coping with technology glitches and struggling with our own desire to make a good impression from a distance.

Numerous studies have shown that businesses who employ teleworkers enjoy such bottom line benefits as increased productivity, lower turnover and reduced overhead but the question remains whether telework, as it's currently practiced, benefits the worker.

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In the recent nationwide study of 1,008 Americans aged 21 and over, conducted by the Radcliffe Public Policy Center, people were asked about their attitudes on work and life issues. What did Americans say they want? Workers in the study, *Life's Work*: *Generational Attitudes Toward Work and Life Integration*, said they want jobs that allow for family time.

For telework to really work in the federal sector and the rest of society, we need to develop a "best practices" guide that sets a kind of business etiquette that Miss Manners would give a gracious nod. To help make the telework experience work for everyone, here are four easy rules of thumb:

1. Whether they work at home or offsite, teleworkers need to set actual office hours so there is a clear understanding about when they should be working. Employers and co-workers need to respect these schedules and plan accordingly.
2. Family and friends need to realize that working from home means actually working. The same etiquette that keeps you from phoning people at work should apply to the home office as well.
3. To keep offsite workers from feeling isolated, managers should bring teleworkers, back to the main office at regular intervals and make sure that they are included in all office events and special occasions.
4. Ultimately, teleworkers must police themselves. They must learn when to be in touch and when to be unavailable. They must close the office door, shut off the cell phone and resist the urge to check business e-mail during the time set aside for the rest of their life.

So what role can teleworking play in either helping or hindering the balance between work and life?

At the very least, the evidence suggests that the concept "work/life integration" often cited as the barometer for having a good quality of life may actually be quite a problematic issue for many workers, particularly those who work from home. The greater integration of work with the other parts of life, prompted by new forms of work organization such as telecommuting, means that working from home has the potential of becoming an overwhelming 24-7 job.

The *Life's Work* survey showed that Americans realize that telecommuting is not a panacea. Galinsky and Kim's research illustrated that telework doesn't necessarily solve the problem of work and life balance. The impact of teleworking on work-life balance is dependent upon a variety of factors including how we as individuals interact with and use the system of telework.

If we are going to implement teleworking on a wider scale we need to encourage employers and employees to develop a set of strategies that will help them cope with the specific demands of working from home. This etiquette should include being mindful of the need to maintain the boundaries between work and life. With the prospect of so many of us working from home in the future, the Federal government has the opportunity to take the lead and provide a "best practices" model for future telecommuting programs. It would be nice to know that the government will not only be sending workers home but also sending them home happy.

The vast majority of them, nearly 80%, and even higher percentages of women and young men, say it is very important for them to have a work schedule that allows them to spend time with their family.

But, as we all probably know, the realities of being able to achieve more family time are particularly difficult for Americans. We all seem to face a terrible time crunch.

Nearly half of the workers surveyed said they were on the job more than 40 hours per week and one in five work over 50 hours per week.

And more hours spent working means fewer hours are spent sleeping. On a typical worknight, 72% of workers aren't getting the eight hours of sleep recommended by sleep experts and 44% admit to sleeping only 6 hours or less per night.

Time is at such a premium that the majority (64%) says they would prefer more time to more money. Young men, especially those 21-39, say that they would even give up pay for more family time (71%).

But what constitutes family time? As Galinsky and Kim's paper shows, time spent at home working doesn't constitute family time. Teleworking doesn't necessarily allow for more focused family time, that is, time when one is there both physically and mentally. In fact, when we bring work home it seems that, for men especially, we may bring our unhealthy work attitudes and practices home as well. As Galinsky and Kim state "when work is nearby, fathers may have a harder time putting work aside to pay attention to their children."

American workers seem to understand that telecommuting is a double-edged sword. When asked what changes they would prefer to make in order to make their work life easier, telecommuting is at the bottom of the list. More people, 70% of those surveyed, say that more flexible hours would make their lives easier. But on telecommuting, workers are more divided. About 50% said that telecommuting would make their work life easier but fully 45% felt it would not. Why the ambivalence? Probably the most clear message regarding telework in the Life's Work survey is that that people want to maintain the distance between work and family: 83% said they prefer distinct boundaries between work life and home life.

For all of the benefits that technology can bring—and has brought—to our lives, it has also had the effect of chipping away at those barriers between work and life.

The technology of telework (that is, home offices with computers connected to the workplace, cell phones, voicemails and fax machines) allows us to have access to work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. But it doesn't mean we should be working all of the time.

We need to set up a new work etiquette based on the old work ethic that we work 8 hours per day 5 days per week. Even though the technology enables and even demands that we pay attention to work on our off hours, employers and employees must come to an understanding that there are going to be times when an employee is not at work. Employees themselves need to understand this and take it to heart.

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Appendix

Supervisor support **(4-point scale)**

- My supervisor is understanding when I talk about personal or family issues that affect my work.
- I feel comfortable bringing up personal or family issues with my supervisor.
- My supervisor really cares about the effect that work demands have on my personal and family life.

Coworker relations **(4-point scale)**

- I feel I am really a part of the group of people I work with.
- I look forward to being with the people I work with each day.

Culture **(4-point scale)**

- There is an unwritten rule at my place of employment that you can't take care of family needs on company time.
- At my place of employment, employees who put their family or personal needs ahead of their jobs are not looked on favorably.

Autonomy **(4-point scale)**

- I have the freedom to decide what I do.
- I have a lot of say about what happens on my job.

Learning opportunities **(4-point scale)**

- I am satisfied with the opportunities that I have at work to learn new skills that could help me get a better job or find another equally good job if this one doesn't work out.
- My job requires that I keep learning new things.
- My job requires that I be creative.

Stress and frustration **(4-point scale)**

- In a typical work week, how much stress do you experience in your job?
- In a typical work week, how much frustration do you experience in your job?

Difficulty focusing on job **(5-point scale)**

- Is it very difficult to focus on the work you have to do?
- Do you work on too many tasks at the same time?
- Are you interrupted during the work day, making it difficult to get your work done?

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